THE MYSTERY OF SASASSA VALLEY

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Do I know why Tom Donahue is called "Lucky Tom?" Yes; I do; and that is more than one in ten of those who call him so can say. I have knocked about a deal in my time, and seen some strange sights, but none stranger than the way in which Tom gained that sobriquet and his fortune with it. For I was with him at the time.—Tell it? Oh, certainly; but it is a longish story and a very strange one; so fill up your glass again, and light another cigar while I try to reel it off. Yes; a very strange one; beats some fairy stories I have heard; but it's true sir, every word of it. There are men alive at Cape Colony now who'll remember it and confirm what I say. Many a time has the tale been told round the fire in Boers' cabins from Orange State to Griqualand; yes, and out in the Bush and at the Diamond Fields too.

I'm roughish now sir; but I was entered at the Middle Temple once, and studied for the Bar. Tom—worse luck!—was one of my fellow- students; and a wildish time we had of it, until at last our finances ran short, and we were compelled to give up our so-called studies, and look about for some part of the world where two young fellows with strong arms and sound constitutions might make their mark. In those days the tide of emigration had scarcely begun to set in towards Africa, and so we thought our best chance would be down at Cape Colony. Well—to make a long story short— we set sail, and were deposited in Cape Town with less than five pounds in our pockets; and there we parted. We each tried our hands at many things, and had ups and downs; but when, at the end of three years, chance led each of us up-country and we met again, we were, I regret to say, in almost as bad a plight as when we started.

Well, this was not much of a commencement; and very disheartened we were, so disheartened that Tom spoke of going back to England and getting a clerkship. For you see we didn't know that we had played out all our small cards, and that the trumps were going to turn up. No; we thought our "hands" were bad all through. It was a very lonely part of the country that we were in, inhabited by a few scattered farmers, whose houses were stockaded and fenced in to defend them against the Kaffirs. Tom Donahue and I had a little hut right out in the Bush; but we were known to possess nothing, and to be handy with our revolvers, so we had little to fear. There we waited doing odd jobs, and hoping that something would turn up. Well, after we had been there about a month something did turn up upon a certain night, something which was the making of both of us; and it's about that night sir, that I'm going to tell you. I remember it well. The wind was howling past our cabin, and the rain threatened to burst in our rude window. We had a great wood-fire crackling and sputtering on the hearth, by which I was sitting mending a whip, while Tom was lying in his bunk groaning disconsolately at the chance which had led him to such a place.

"Cheer up, Tom—cheer up," said I. "No man ever knows what may be awaiting him."

"III-luck, ill-luck, Jack," he answered. "I always was an unlucky dog. Here have I been three years in this abominable country; and I see lads fresh from England jingling the money in their pockets, while I am as poor as when I landed. Ah, Jack, if you want to keep your head above water, old friend, you must try your fortune away from me."

"Nonsense, Tom; you're down in your luck to-night. But hark! Here's some one coming outside. Dick Wharton, by the tread; he'll rouse you, if any man can."

Even as I spoke the door was flung open, and honest Dick Wharton, with the water pouring from him, stepped in, his hearty red face looking through the haze like a harvest-moon. He shook himself, and after greeting us sat down by the fire to warm himself.

"Whereaway, Dick, on such a night as this?" said I. "You'll find the rheumatism a worse foe than the Kaffirs, unless you keep more regular hours."

Dick was looking unusually serious, almost frightened, one would say, if one did not know the man. "Had to go," he replied—"had to go. One of Madison's cattle has been straying down Sasassa Valley, and of course none of our blacks would go down that Valley at night; and if we lad waited till morning, the brute would have been in Kaffirland."

"Why wouldn't they go down Sasassa Valley at night?" asked Tom.

"Kaffirs, I suppose," said I.

"Ghosts," said Dick.

We both laughed.

"I suppose they didn't give such a matter-of-fact fellow as you a sight of their charms?" said Tom from the bunk.

"Yes," said Dick seriously—"yes; I saw what the niggers talk about; and I promise you, lads, I don't want ever to see it again."

Tom sat up in his bed. "Nonsense, Dick; you're joking, man! Come, tell us all about it. The legend first, and your own experience afterwards.— Pass him over the bottle, Jack."

"Well, as to the legend," began Dick "—it seems that the niggers have had it handed down to them that Sasassa Valley is haunted by a frightful fiend. Hunters and wanderers passing down the defile have seen its glowing eyes under the shadows of the cliff; and the story goes that whoever has chanced to encounter that baleful glare, has had his after-life blighted by the malignant power of this creature. Whether that be true or not," continued Dick ruefully, "I may have an opportunity of

judging for myself."

"Go on, Dick—go on," cried Tom. "Let's hear about what you saw."

"Well, I was groping down the Valley, looking for that cow of Madison's, and I had, I suppose, got half-way down, where a black craggy cliff juts into the ravine on the right, when I halted to have a pull at my flask. I had my eye fixed at the time upon the projecting cliff I have mentioned, and noticed nothing unusual about it. I then put up my flask and took a step or two forward, when in a moment there burst apparently from the base of the rock, about eight feet from the ground and a hundred yards from me, a strange lurid glare, flickering and oscillating, gradually dying away and then reappearing again. —No, no; I've seen many a glow-worm and firefly—nothing of that sort. There it was burning away, and I suppose I gazed at it, trembling in every limb, for fully ten minutes. Then I took a step forwards, when instantly it vanished, vanished like a candle blown out. I stepped back again; but it was some time before I could find the exact spot and position from which it was visible. At last, there it was, the weird reddish light, flickering away as before. Then I screwed up my courage, and made for the rock; but the ground was so uneven that it was impossible to steer straight; and though I walked along the whole base of the cliff, I could see nothing. Then I made tracks for home; and I can tell you, boys, that until you remarked it, I never knew it was raining, the whole way along.—But hollo! what's the matter with Tom?"

What indeed? Tom was now sitting with his legs over the side of the bunk, and his whole face betraying excitement so intense as to be almost painful. "The fiend would have two eyes. How many lights did you see, Dick? Speak out!"

"Only one."

"Hurrah!" cried Tom—"that's better!" Whereupon he kicked the blankets into the middle of the room, and began pacing up and down with long feverish strides. Suddenly he stopped opposite Dick, and laid his hand upon his shoulder: "I say, Dick, could we get to Sasassa Valley before sunrise?"

"Scarcely," said Dick.

"Well, look here; we are old friends, Dick Wharton, you and I. Now, don't you tell any other man what you have told us, for a week. You'll promise that; won't you?"

I could see by the look on Dick's face as he acquiesced that he considered poor Tom to be mad; and indeed I was myself completely mystified by his conduct. I had, however, seen so many proofs of my friend's good sense and quickness of apprehension, that I thought it quite possible that Wharton's story had had a meaning in his eyes which I was too obtuse to take in.

All night Tom Donahue was greatly excited, and when Wharton left he begged him to remember his promise, and also elicited from him a description of the exact spot at which he had seen the apparition, as well as the hour at which it appeared. After his departure, which must have been about four in the morning, I turned into my bunk and watched Tom sitting by the fire splicing two sticks together, until I fell asleep. I suppose I must have slept about two hours; but when I awoke, Tom was still sitting working away in almost the same position. He had fixed the one stick across the top of the other so as to form a rough T, and was now busy in fitting a smaller stick into the angle between them, by manipulating which, the cross one could be either cocked up or depressed to any extent. He had cut notches too in the perpendicular stick, so that by the aid of the small prop, the cross one could be kept in any position for an indefinite time.

"Look here, Jack!" he cried, whenever he saw that I was awake, "Come, and give me your opinion. Suppose I put this cross-stick pointing straight at a thing, and arranged this small one so as to keep it so, and left it, I could find that thing again if I wanted it—don't you think I could, Jack —don't you think so?" he continued nervously, clutching me by the arm.

"Well," I answered, "it would depend on how far off the thing was, and how accurately it was pointed. If it were any distance, I'd cut sights on your cross-stick; then a string tied to the end of it, and held in a plumb-line forwards, would lead you pretty near what you wanted. But surely, Tom, you don't intend to localise the ghost in that way?"

"You'll see to-night, old friend—you'll see tonight. I'll carry this to the Sasassa Valley. You get the loan of Madison's crowbar, and come with me; but mind you tell no man where you are going, or what you want it for."

All day Tom was walking up and down the room, or working hard at the apparatus. His eyes were glistening, his cheek hectic, and he had all the symptoms of high fever. "Heaven grant that Dick's diagnosis be not correct!" I thought, as I returned with the crowbar; and yet, as evening drew near, I found myself imperceptibly sharing the excitement.

About six o'clock Tom sprang to his feet and seized his sticks. "I can stand it no longer, Jack," he cried; "up with your crowbar, and hey for Sasassa Valley! To-night's work, my lad, will either make us or mar us! Take your six-shooter, in case we meet the Kaffirs. I daren't take mine, Jack," he continued, putting his hands upon my shoulders—"I daren't take mine; for if my ill-luck sticks to me to-night, I don't know what I might not do with it."

Well, having filled our pockets with provisions, we set out, and as we took our wearisome way towards the Sasassa Valley, I frequently attempted to elicit from my companion some clue as to his intentions. But his only answer was: "Let us hurry on, Jack. Who knows how many have heard of Wharton's adventure by this time! Let us hurry on, or we may not be first in the field!"

Well sir, we struggled on through the hills for a matter of ten miles; till at last, after descending a crag, we saw opening out in front of us a ravine so sombre and dark that it might have been the gate of Hades itself; cliffs many hundred feet high shut in on every side the gloomy boulder-studded passage which led through the haunted defile into Kaffirland. The

moon rising above the crags, threw into strong relief the rough irregular pinnacles of rock by which they were topped, while all below was dark as Erebus.

"The Sasassa Valley?" said I.

"Yes," said Tom.

I looked at him. He was calm now; the flush and feverishness had passed away; his actions were deliberate and slow. Yet there was a certain rigidity in his face and glitter in his eye which shewed that a crisis had come.

We entered the pass, stumbling along amid the great boulders. Suddenly I heard a short quick exclamation from Tom. "That's the crag!" he cried, pointing to a great mass looming before us in the darkness. "Now Jack, for any favour use your eyes! We're about a hundred yards from that cliff, I take it; so you move slowly towards one side, and I'll do the same towards the other. When you see anything, stop, and call out. Don't take more than twelve inches in a step, and keep your eye fixed on the cliff about eight feet from the ground. Are you ready?"

"Yes." I was even more excited than Tom by this time. What his intention or object was, I could not conjecture, beyond that he wanted to examine by daylight the part of the cliff from which the light came. Yet the influence of the romantic situation and of my companion's suppressed excitement was so great, that I could feel the blood coursing through my veins and count the pulses throbbing at my temples.

"Start!" cried Tom; and we moved off, he to the right, Ito the left, each with our eyes fixed intently on the base of the crag. I had moved perhaps twenty feet, when in a moment it burst upon me. Through the growing darkness there shone a small ruddy glowing point, the light from which waned and increased, flickered and oscillated, each change producing a more weird effect than the last. The old Kaffir superstition came into my mind, and I felt a cold shudder pass over me. In my excitement, I stepped a pace backwards, when instantly the light went out, leaving utter darkness in its place; but when I advanced again, there was the ruddy glare glowing from the base of the cliff. "Tom, Tom!" I cried.

"Ay, ay!" I heard him exclaim, as he hurried over towards me.

"There it is—there, up against the cliff!"

Tom was at my elbow. "I see nothing," said he.

"Why, there, there, man, in front of you!" I stepped to the right as I spoke, when the light instantly vanished from my eyes.

But from Tom's ejaculations of delight it was clear that from my former position it was visible to him also. "Jack," he cried, as he turned and wrung my hand—"Jack, you and I can never complain of our luck again. Now heap up a few stones where we are standing.—That's right. Now we must fix my sign-post firmly in at the top. There! It would take a strong wind to blow that down; and we only need it to hold out till morning. o Jack, my boy, to think that only yesterday we were talking of becoming clerks, and you saying that no man knew what was awaiting him too! By Jove, Jack, it would make a good story!"

By this time we had firmly fixed the perpendicular stick in between two large stones; and Tom bent down and peered along the horizontal one. For fully a quarter of an hour he was alternately raising and depressing it, until at last, with a sigh of satisfaction, he fixed the prop into the angle, and stood up. "Look along, Jack," he said. "You have as straight an eye to take a sight as any man I know of."

I looked along. There, beyond the further sight was the ruddy scintillating speck, apparently at the end of the stick itself, so accurately had it been adjusted. "And now, my boy," said Tom, "let's have some supper, and a sleep. There's nothing more to be done to-night; but we'll need all our wits and strength to-morrow. Get some sticks, and kindle a fire here, and then we'll be able to keep an eye on our signal-post, and see that nothing happens to it during the night."

Well sir, we kindled a fire, and had supper with the Sasassa demon's eye rolling and glowing in front of us the whole night through. Not always in the same place though; for after supper, when I glanced along the sights to have another look at it, it was nowhere to be seen. The information did not, however, seem to disturb Tom in any way. He merely remarked: "It's the moon, not the thing, that has shifted;" and coiling himself up, went to sleep.

By early dawn we were both up, and gazing along our pointer at the cliff; but we could make out nothing save one dead monotonous slaty surface, rougher perhaps at the part we were examining than elsewhere, but otherwise presenting nothing remarkable.

"Now for your idea, Jack!" said Tom Donahue, unwinding a long thin cord from round his waist. "You fasten it, and guide me while I take the other end." So saying he walked off to the base of the cliff, holding one end of the cord, while I drew the other taut, and wound it round the middle of the horizontal stick, passing it through the sight at the end. By this means I could direct Tom to the right or left, until we had our string stretching from the point of attachment, through the sight, and on to the rock, which it struck about eight feet from the ground. Tom drew a chalk circle of about three feet diameter round the spot, and then called to me to come and join him. "We've managed this business together, Jack," he said, "and we'll find what we are to find, together." The circle he had drawn embraced a part of the rock smoother than the rest, save that about the centre there were a few rough protuberances or knobs. One of these Tom pointed to with a cry of delight. It was a roughish brownish mass about the size of a man's closed fist, and looking like a bit of dirty glass let into the wall of the cliff. "That's it!" he cried—"that's it!"

"That's what?"

"Why, man, a diamond, and such a one as there isn't a monarch in Europe but would envy Tom Donahue the possession of. Up with your crowbar, and we'll soon exorcise the demon of Sasassa Valley!"

I was so astounded that for a moment I stood speechless with surprise, gazing at the treasure which had so unexpectedly fallen into our hands.

"Here, hand me the crowbar," said Tom. "Now, by using this little round knob which projects from the cliff here, as a fulcrum, we may be able to lever it off.—Yes; there it goes. I never thought it could have come so easily. Now, Jack, the sooner we get back to our hut and then down to Cape Town, the better."

We wrapped up our treasure, and made our way across the hills, towards home. On the way, Tom told me how, while a law-student in the Middle Temple, he had come upon a dusty pamphlet in the library, by one Jans van Hounym, which told of an experience very similar to ours, which had befallen that worthy Duchman in the latter part of the seventeenth century, and which resulted in the discovery of a luminous diamond. This tale it was which had come into Tom's head as he listened to honest Dick Wharton's ghost-story; while the means which he had adopted to verify his supposition sprang from his own fertile Irish brain.

"We'll take it down to Cape Town," continued Tom, "and if we can't dispose of it with advantage there, it will be worth our while to ship for London with it. Let us go along to Madison's first, though; he knows something of these things, and can perhaps give us some idea of what we may consider a fair price for our treasure."

We turned off from the track accordingly, before reaching our hut, and kept along the narrow path leading to Madison's farm. He was at lunch when we entered; and in a minute we were seated at each side of him, enjoying South African hospitality.

"Well," he said, after the servants were gone, "what's in the wind now? I see you have something to say to me. What is it?"

Tom produced his packet, and solemnly untied the handkerchiefs which enveloped it. "There!" he said, putting his crystal on the table; "what would you say was a fair price for that?"

Madison took it up and examined it critically. "Well," he said, laying it down again, "in its crude state about twelve shillings per ton."

"Twelve shillings!" cried Tom, starting to his feet. "Don't you see what it is?"

"Rock-salt!"

"Rock fiddle; a diamond."

"Taste it!" said Madison.

Torn put it to his lips, dashed it down with a dreadful exclamation, and rushed out of the room.

I felt sad and disappointed enough myself; but presently remembering what Tom had said about the pistol, I, too, left the house, and made for the hut, leaving Madison open-mouthed with astonishment. When I got in, I found Tom lying in his bunk with his face to the wall, too dispirited apparently to answer my consolations. Anathematising Dick and Madison, the Sasassa demon, and everything else, I strolled out of the hut, and refreshed myself with a pipe after our wearisome adventure. I was about fifty yards away from the hut, when I heard issuing from it the sound which of all others I least expected to hear. Had it been a groan or an oath, I should have taken it as a matter of course; but the sound which caused me to stop and take the pipe out of my mouth was a hearty roar of laughter! Next moment, Tom himself emerged from the door, his whole face radiant with delight. "Game for another ten-mile walk, old fellow?"

"What! for another lump of rock-salt, at twelve shillings a ton?"

"'No more of that, Hal, an you love me,'" grinned Tom. "Now look here, Jack. What blessed fools we are to be so floored by a trifle! Just sit on this stump for five minutes, and I'll make it as clear as daylight. You've seen many a lump of rock-salt stuck in a crag, and so have I, though we did make such a mull of this one. Now, Jack, did any of the pieces you have ever seen shine in the darkness brighter than any fire-fly?"

"Well, I can't say they ever did."

"I'd venture to prophesy that if we waited until night, which we won't do, we would see that light still glimmering among the rocks. Therefore, Jack, when we took away this worthless salt, we took the wrong crystal. It is no very strange thing in these hills that a piece of rock-salt should be lying within a foot of a diamond. It caught our eyes, and we were excited, and so we made fools of ourselves, and left the real stone behind. Depend upon it, Jack, the Sasassa gem is lying within this magic circle of chalk upon the face of yonder cliff. Come, old fellow, light your pipe and stow your revolver, and we'll be off before that fellow Madison has time to put two and two together."

I don't know that I was very sanguine this time. I had begun in fact to look upon the diamond as a most unmitigated nuisance. However, rather than throw a damper on Tom's expectations, I announced myself eager to start. What a walk it was! Tom was always a good mountaineer, but his excitement seemed to lend him wings that day, while I scrambled along after him as best I could. When we got within half a mile he broke into the "double," and never pulled up until he reached

the round white circle upon the cliff. Poor old Tom! when I came up, his mood had changed, and he was standing with his hands in his pockets, gazing vacantly before him with a rueful countenance.

"Look!" he said—"look!" and he pointed at the cliff. Not a sign of anything in the least resembling a diamond there. The circle included nothing but flat slate-coloured stone, with one large hole, where we had extracted the rock-salt, and one or two smaller depressions. No sign of the gem. "I've been over every inch of it," said poor Tom. "It's not there. Some one has been here and noticed the chalk, and taken it. Come home, Jack; I feel sick and tired. Oh! had any man ever luck like mine!"

I turned to go, but took one last look at the cliff first. Tom was already ten paces off.

"Honor!" I cried, "don't you see any change in that circle since yesterday?"

"What d'ye mean?" said Tom.

"Don't you miss a thing that was there before?"

"The rock-salt?" said Tom.

"No; but the little round knob that we used for a fulcrum. I suppose we must have wrenched it off in using the lever. Let's have a look at what it's made of."

Accordingly, at the foot of the cliff we searched about among the loose stones.

"Here you are, Jack! We've done it at last! We're made men!"

I turned round, and there was Tom radiant with delight, and with a little corner of black rock in his hand. At first sight it seemed to be merely a chip from the cliff; but near the base there was projecting from it an object which Tom was now exultingly pointing out. It looked at first something like a glass eye; but there was a depth and brilliancy about it such as glass never exhibited. There was no mistake this time; we had certainly got possession of a jewel of great value; and with light hearts we turned from the valley, bearing away with us the "fiend" which had so long reigned there.

There sir; I've spun my story out too long, and tired you perhaps. You see when I get talking of those rough old days, I kind of see the little cabin again, and the brook beside it, and the bush around, and seem to hear Tom's honest voice once more. There's little for me to say now. We prospered on the gem. Tom Donahue, as you know, has set up here, and is well known about town. I have done well, farming and ostrich-raising in Africa. We set old Dick Wharton up in business, and he is one of our nearest neighbours. If you should ever be coming up our way sir, you'll not forget to ask for Jack Turnbull—Jack Turnbull of Sasassa Farm.

THE MYSTERY OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF UNCLE JEREMY

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I

My life has been a somewhat chequered one, and it has fallen to my lot during the course of it to have had several unusual experiences. There is one episode, however, which is so surpassingly strange that whenever I look back to it it reduces the others to insignificance. It looks up out of the mists of the past, gloomy and fantastic, overshadowing the eventless years which preceded and which followed it.

It is not a story which I have often told. A few, but only a few, who know me well have heard the facts from my lips. I have been asked from time to time by these to narrate them to some assemblage of friends, but I have invariably refused, for I have no desire to gain a reputation as an amateur Munchausen. I have yielded to their wishes, however, so far as to draw up this written statement of the facts in connection with my visit to Dunkelthwaite.

Here is John Thurston's first letter to me. It is dated April 1862. I take it from my desk and copy it as it stands:

> *"My dear Lawrence,—if you knew my utter loneliness and complete ennui I am sure you would have pity upon me and come up to share my solitude. You have often made vague promises of visiting Dunkelthwaite and having a look at the Yorkshire Fells. What time could suit you better than the present?Of course I understand that you are hard at work, but as you are not actually taking out classes you can read just as well here as in Baker Street. Pack up your books, like a good fellow, and come along! We have a snug little room, with writing-desk and armchair, which will just do for your study. Let me know when we may expect you.*
>
> *"When I say that I am lonely I do not mean that there is any lack of people in the house. On the contrary, we form rather a large household. First and foremost, of course, comes my poor Uncle Jeremy, garrulous and imbecile, shuffling about in his list slippers, and composing, as is his wont, innumerable bad verses. I think I told you when last we met of that trait in his character. It has attained such a pitch that he has an amanuensis, whose sole duty it is to copy down and preserve these effusions. This fellow, whose name is Copperthorne, has become as necessary to the old man as his foolscap or as the 'Universal Rhyming Dictionary.' I can't say I care for him myself, but then I have always shared Caesar's prejudice against lean men—though, by the way, little Julius was rather inclined that way himself if we may believe the medals. Then we have the two children of my Uncle Samuel, who were adopted by Jeremy—there were three of them, but one has gone the way of all flesh—and their governess, a stylish-looking brunette with Indian blood in her veins. Besides all these, there are three maidservants and/the old groom, so you see we have quite a little world of our own in this out-of-the- way corner. For all that, my dear Hugh, I long for a familiar face and for a congenial companion. I am deep in chemistry myself, so I won't interrupt your studies. Write by return to your isolated friend,*
>
> *"JOHN H. THURSTON."*

At the time that I received this letter I was in lodgings in London, and was working hard for the final examination which should make me a qualified medical man. Thurston and I had been close friends at Cambridge before I took to the study of medicine, and I had a great desire to see him again. On the other hand, I was rather afraid that, in spite of his assurances, my studies might suffer by the change. I pictured to myself the childish old man, the lean secretary, the stylish governess, the two children, probably spoiled and noisy, and I came to the conclusion that when we were all cooped together in one country house there would be very little room for quiet reading. At the end of two days' cogitation I had almost made up my mind to refuse the invitation, when I received another letter from Yorkshire even more pressing than the first.

"We expect to hear from you by every post," my friend said, "and there is never a knock that I do not think it is a telegram announcing your train. Your room is all ready, and I think you will find it comfortable. Uncle Jeremy bids me say how very happy he will be to see you. He would have written, but he is absorbed in a great epic poem of five thousand lines or so, and he spends his day trotting about the rooms, while Copperthorne stalks behind him like the monster in Frankenstein, with notebook and pencil, jotting down the words of wisdom as they drop from his lips. By the way, I think I mentioned the brunettish governess to you. I might throw her out as a bait to you if you retain your taste for ethnological studies. She is the child of an Indian chieftain, whose wife was an Englishwoman. He was killed in the mutiny, fighting against us, and, his estates being seized by Government, his daughter, then fifteen, was left almost destitute. Some

charitable German merchant in Calcutta adopted her, it seems, and brought her over to Europe with him together with his own daughter. The latter died, and then Miss Warrender—as we call her, after her mother—answered uncle's advertisement; and here she is. Now, my dear boy, stand not upon the order of your coming, but come at once."

There were other things in this second letter which prevent me from quoting it in full.

There was no resisting the importunity of my old friend, so, with many inward grumbles, I hastily packed up my books, and, having telegraphed overnight, started for Yorkshire the first thing in the morning. I well remember that it was a miserable day, and that the journey seemed to be an interminable one as I sat huddled up in a corner of the draughty carriage, revolving in my mind many problems of surgery and of medicine. I had been warned that the little wayside station of Ingleton, some fifteen miles from Carnforth, was the nearest to my destination, and there I alighted just as John Thurston came dashing down the country road in a high dog-cart. He waved his whip enthusiastically at the sight of me, and pulling up his horse with a jerk, sprang out and on to the platform.

"My dear Hugh," he cried, "I'm so delighted to see you! It's so kind of you to come!" He wrung my hand until my arm ached.

"I'm afraid you'll find me very bad company now that I am here," I answered; "I am up to my eyes in work."

"Of course, of course," he said, in his good-humoured way. "I reckoned on this. We'll have time for a crack at the rabbits for all that. It's a longish drive, and you must be bitterly cold, so let's start for home at once."

We rattled off along the dusty road.

"I think you'll like your room," my friend remarked. "You'll soon find yourself at home. You know it is not often that I visit Dunkelthwaite myself, and I am only just beginning to settle down and get my laboratory into working order. I have been here a fortnight. It's an open secret that I occupy a prominent position in old Uncle Jeremy's will, so my father thought it only right that I should come up and do the polite. Under the circumstances I can hardly do less than put myself out a little now and again."

"Certainly not," I said.

"And besides, he's a very good old fellow. You'll be amused at our ménage. A princess for governess—it sounds well, doesn't it? I think our imperturbable secretary is somewhat gone in that direction. Turn up your coat-collar, for the wind is very sharp."

The road ran over a succession of low bleak hills, which were devoid of all vegetation save a few scattered gorse-bushes and a thin covering of stiff wiry grass, which gave nourishment to a scattered flock of lean, hungry-looking sheep. Alternately we dipped down into a hollow or rose to the summit of an eminence from which we could see the road winding as a thin white track over successive hills beyond. Every here and there the monotony of the landscape was broken by jagged scarps, where the grey granite peeped grimly out, as though nature had been sorely wounded until her gaunt bones protruded through their covering. In the distance lay a range of mountains, with one great peak shooting up from amongst them coquettishly draped in a wreath of clouds which reflected the ruddy light of the setting sun.

"That's Ingleborough," my companion said, indicating the mountain with his whip, "and these are the Yorkshire Fells. You won't find a wilder, bleaker place in all England. They breed a good race of men. The raw militia who beat the Scotch chivalry at the Battle of the Standard came from this part of the country. Just jump down, old fellow and open the gate."

We had pulled up at a place where a long moss-grown wall ran parallel to the road. It was broken by a dilapidated iron gate, flanked by two pillars, on the summit of which were stone devices which appeared to represent some heraldic animal, though wind and rain had reduced them to shapeless blocks. A ruined cottage, which may have served at some time as a lodge, stood on one side. I pushed the gate open and we drove up a long, winding avenue, grass- grown and uneven, but lined by magnificent oaks, which shot their branches so thickly over us that the evening twilight deepened suddenly into darkness.

"I'm afraid our avenue won't impress you much," Thurston said, with a laugh. "It's one of the old man's whims to let nature have her way in everything. Here we are at last at Dunkelthwaite."

As he spoke we swung round a curve in the avenue marked by a patriarchal oak which towered high above the others, and came upon a great square whitewashed house with a lawn in front of it. The lower part of the building was all in shadow, but up at the top a row of blood-shot windows glimmered out at the setting sun. At the sound of the wheels an old man in livery ran out and seized the horse's head when we pulled up.

"You can put her up, Elijah," my friend said, as we jumped down. "Hugh, let me introduce you to my Uncle Jeremy."

"How d'ye do? How d'ye do?" cried a wheezy cracked voice, and looking up I saw a little red-faced man who was standing waiting for us in the porch. He wore a cotton cloth tied round his head after the fashion of Pope and other eighteenth-century celebrities, and was further distinguished by a pair of enormous slippers. These contrasted so strangely with his thin spindle shanks that he appeared to be wearing snowshoes, a resemblance which was heightened by the fact that when he walked he was compelled to slide his feet along the ground in order to retain his grip of these unwieldly appendages.

"You must be tired, sir. Yes, and cold, sir," he said, in a strange jerky way, as he shook me by the hand. "We must be hospitable to you, we must indeed. Hospitality is one of the old-world virtues which we still retain. Let me see, what are

those lines? ‘Ready and strong the Yorkshire arm, but oh, the Yorkshire heart is warm?’ Neat and terse, sir. That comes from one of my poems. What poem is it, Copperthorne?”

“‘The Harrying of Borrodaile’,” said a voice behind him, and a tall long- visaged man stepped forward into the circle of light which was thrown by the lamp above the porch. John introduced us, and I remember that his hand as I shook it was cold and unpleasantly clammy.

This ceremony over, my friend led the way to my room, passing through many passages and corridors connected by old-fashioned and irregular staircases. I noticed as I passed the thickness of the walls and the strange slants and angles of the ceilings, suggestive of mysterious spaces above. The chamber set apart for me proved, as John had said, to be a cheery little sanctum with a crackling fire and a well-stocked bookcase. I began to think as I pulled on my slippers that I might have done worse after all than accept this Yorkshire invitation.

II

When we descended to the dining-room the rest of the household had already assembled for dinner. Old Jeremy, still wearing his quaint headgear, sat at the head of the table. Next to him, on his right, sat a very dark young lady with black hair and eyes, who was introduced to me as Miss Warrender. Beside her were two pretty children, a boy and a girl, who were evidently her charges. I sat opposite her, with Copperthorne on my left, while John faced his uncle. I can almost fancy now that I can see the yellow glare of the great oil lamp throwing Rembrandt-like lights and’ shades upon the ring of faces, some of which were soon to have so strange an interest for me.

It was a pleasant meal, apart from the excellence of the viands and the fact that the long journey had sharpened my appetite. Uncle Jeremy overflowed with anecdote and quotation, delighted to have found a new listener. Neither Miss Warrender nor Copperthorne spoke much, but all that the latter said bespoke the thoughtful and educated man. As to John, he had so much to say of college reminiscences and subsequent events that I fear his dinner was a scanty one.

When the dessert was put on the table Miss Warrender took the children away, and Uncle Jeremy withdrew into the library, where we could hear the dull murmur of his voice as he dictated to his amanuensis. My old friend and I sat for some time before the fire discussing the many things which had happened to both of us since our last meeting.

“And what do you think of our household?” he asked at last, with a smile.

I answered that I was very much interested with what I had seen of it. “Your uncle,” I said, “is quite a character. I like him very much.”

“Yes; he has a warm heart behind all his peculiarities. Your coming seems to have cheered him up, for he’s never been quite himself since little Ethel’s death. She was the youngest of Uncle Sam’s children, and came here with the others, but she had a fit or something in the shrubbery a couple of months ago. They found her lying dead there in the evening. It was a great blow to the old man.”

“It must have been to Miss Warrender too?” I remarked. “Yes; she was very much cut up. She had only been here a week or two at the time. She had driven over to Kirby Lonsdale that day to buy something.”

“I was very much interested,” I said, “in all that you told me about her. You were not chaffing, I suppose?”

“No, no; it’s true as gospel. Her father was Achmet Genghis Khan, a semi- independent chieftain somewhere in the Central Provinces. He was a bit of a heathen fanatic in spite of his Christian wife, and he became chummy with the Nana, and mixed himself up in the Cawnpore business, so Government came down heavily on him.”

“She must have been quite a woman before she left her tribe,” I said. “What view of religion does she take? Does she side with her father or mother?”

“We never press that question,” my friend answered. “Between ourselves, I don’t think she’s very orthodox. Her mother must have been a good woman, and besides teaching her English, she is a good French scholar, and plays remarkably well. Why, there she goes!”

As he spoke the sound of a piano was heard from the next room, and we both paused to listen. At first the player struck a few isolated notes, as though uncertain how to proceed. Then came a series of clanging chords and jarring discords, until out of the chaos there suddenly swelled a strange barbaric march, with blare of trumpet and crash of cymbal. Louder and louder it pealed forth in a gust of wild melody, and then died away once more into the jerky chords which had preceded it. Then we heard the sound of the shutting of the piano, and the music was at an end.

“She does that every night,” my friend remarked; “I suppose it is some Indian reminiscence. Picturesque, don’t you think so? Now’ don’t stay here longer than you wish. Your room is ready whenever you would like to study.”

I took my companion at his word and left him with his uncle and Copperthorne, who had returned into the room, while I went upstairs and read Medical Jurisprudence for a couple of hours. I imagined that I should see no more of the inhabitants of Dunkelthwaite that night, but I was mistaken, for about ten o’clock Uncle Jeremy thrust his little red face into the room.

“All comfortable?” he asked.

“Excellent, thanks,” I answered.

"That's right. Keep at it. Sure to succeed," he said, in his spasmodic way. "Good night!"

"Good night!" I answered.

"Good night!" said another voice from the passage; and looking out I saw the tall figure of the secretary gliding along at the old man's heels like a long dark shadow.

I went back to my desk and worked for another hour, after which I retired to bed, where I pondered for some time before I dropped to sleep over the curious household of which I had become a member.

III

I was up betimes in the morning and out on the lawn, where I found Miss Warrender, who was picking primroses and making them into a little bunch for the breakfast-table. I approached her before she saw me, and I could not help admiring the beautiful litheness of her figure as she stooped over the flowers. There was a feline grace about her every movement such as I never remember to have seen in any woman. I recalled Thurston's words as to the impression which she had made upon the secretary, and ceased to wonder at it. As she heard my step, she stood up and turned her dark handsome face towards me.

"Good morning, Miss Warrender," I said. "You are an early riser, like myself."

"Yes," she answered. "I have always been accustomed to rise at daybreak."

"What a strange, wild view!" I remarked, looking out over the wide stretch of fells. "I am a stranger to this part of the country, like yourself. How do you like it?"

"I don't like it," she said, frankly. "I detest it. It is cold and bleak and wretched. Look at these"—holding up her bunch of primroses—"they call these things flowers. They have not even a smell."

"You have been used to a more genial climate and a tropical vegetation?"

"Oh, then, Mr. Thurston has been telling you about me," she said, with a smile. "Yes, I have been used to something better than this."

We were standing together when a shadow fell between us, and looking round I found that Copperthorne was standing close behind us. He held out his thin white hand to me with a constrained smile.

"You seem to be able to find your way about already," he remarked, glancing backwards and forwards from my face to that of Miss Warrender. "Let me hold your flowers for you, miss."

"No, thank you," the other said, coldly. "I have picked enough and am going inside."

She swept past him and across the lawn to the house. Copperthorne looked after her with a frowning brow.

"You are a student of medicine, Mr. Lawrence?" he said, turning towards me and stamping one of his feet up and down in a jerky, nervous fashion, as he spoke.

"Yes, I am."

"Oh, we have heard of you students of medicine," he cried in a raised voice, with a little crackling laugh. "You are dreadful fellows, are you not? We have heard of you. There is no standing against you."

"A medical student, sir," I answered, "is usually a gentleman."

"Quite so," he said, in a changed voice. "Of course I was only joking." Nevertheless I could not help noticing that at breakfast he kept his eyes persistently fixed upon me while Miss Warrender was speaking, and if I chanced to make a remark he would flash a glance round at her as though to read in our faces what our thoughts were of each other. It was clear that he took a more than common interest in the beautiful governess, and it seemed to me to be equally evident that his feelings were by no means reciprocated.

We had an illustration that morning of the simple nature of these primitive Yorkshire folk. It appears that the housemaid and the cook, who sleep together, were alarmed during the night by something which their superstitious minds contorted into an apparition. I was sitting after breakfast with Uncle Jeremy, who, with the help of continual promptings from his secretary, was reciting some Border poetry, when there was a tap at the door and the housemaid appeared. Close at her heels came the cook, buxom but timorous, the two mutually encouraging and abetting each other. They told their story in a strophe and antistrophe, like a Greek chorus, Jane talking until her breath failed, when the narrative was taken up by the cook, who, in turn, was supplanted by the other. Much of what they said was almost unintelligible to me owing to their extraordinary dialect, but I could make out the main thread of their story. It appears that in the early morning the cook had been awakened by something touching her face, and starting up had seen a shadowy figure standing by her bed, which figure had at once glided noiselessly from the room. The housemaid was awakened by the cook's cry, and averred stoutly that she had seen the apparition. No amount of cross-examination or reasoning could shake them, and they wound up by both giving notice, which was a practical way of showing that they were honestly scared. They seemed considerably indignant at our want of belief, and ended by bouncing out of the room, leaving Uncle Jeremy angry, Copperthorne contemptuous, and myself very much amused.

I spent nearly the whole of the second day of my visit in my room, and got over a considerable amount of work. In the

evening John and I went down to the rabbit-warren with our guns. I told John as we came back of the absurd scene with the servants in the morning, but it did not seem to strike him in the same ridiculous light that it had me.

"The fact is," *he* said, "in very old houses like ours, where you have the timber rotten and warped, you get curious effects sometimes which predispose the mind to superstition. I have heard one or two things at night during this visit which might have frightened a nervous man, and still more an uneducated servant. Of course all this about apparitions is mere nonsense, but when once the imagination is excited there's no checking it."

"What have you heard, then?" I asked with interest.

"Oh, nothing of any importance," he answered. "Here are the youngsters and Miss Warrender. We mustn't talk about these things before her, or else we shall have her giving warning too, and that would be a loss to the establishment."

She was sitting on a little stile which stood on the outskirts of the wood which surrounds Dunkelthwaite, and the two children were leaning up against her, one on either side, with their hands clasped round her arms, and their chubby faces turned up to hers. It was a pretty picture and we both paused to look at it. She had heard our approach, however, and springing lightly down she came towards us, with the two little ones toddling behind her.

"You must aid me with the weight of your authority," she said to John. "These little rebels are fond of the night air and won't be persuaded to come indoors."

"Don't want to come," said the boy, with decision. "Want to hear the rest of the story."

"Yes—the 'tory," lisped the younger one.

"You shall hear the rest of the story to-morrow if you are good. Here is Mr. Lawrence, who is a doctor he will tell you how bad it is for little boys and girls to be out when the dew falls."

"So you have been hearing a story?" John said as we moved on together.

"Yes—such a good story!" the little chap said with enthusiasm. "Uncle Jeremy tells us stories, but they are in po'try and they are not nearly so nice as Miss Warrender's stories. This one was about elephants—"

"And tigers—and gold—" said the other.

"Yes, and wars and fighting, and the king of the Cheroots—"

"Rajpoots, my dear," said the governess.

"And the scattered tribes that know each other by signs, and the man that was killed in the wood. She knows splendid stories. Why don't you make her tell you some, Cousin John?"

"Really, Miss Warrender, you have excited our curiosity," my companion said. "You must tell us of these wonders."

"They would seem stupid enough to you," she answered, with a laugh. "They are merely a few reminiscences of my early life."

As we strolled along the pathway which led through the wood we met Copperthorne coming from the opposite direction.

"I was looking for you all," he said, with an ungainly attempt at geniality. "I wanted to tell you that it was dinner-time."

"Our watches told us that," said John, rather ungraciously as I thought.

"And you have been all rabbiting together?" the secretary continued, as he stalked along beside us.

"Not all," I answered. "We met Miss Warrender and the children on our way back."

"Oh, Miss Warrender came to meet you as you came back!" said he. This quick contortion of my words, together with the sneering way in which he spoke, vexed me so much that I should have made a sharp rejoinder had it not been for the lady's presence.

I happened to turn my eyes towards the governess at the moment, and I saw her glance at the speaker with an angry sparkle in her eyes which showed that she shared my indignation. I was surprised, however, that same night when about ten o'clock I chanced to look out of the window of my study, to see the two of them walking up and down in the moonlight engaged in deep conversation. I don't know how it was, but the sight disturbed me so much that after several fruitless attempts to continue my studies I threw my books aside and gave up work for the night. About eleven I glanced out again, but they were gone, and shortly afterwards I heard the shuffling step of Uncle Jeremy, and the firm heavy footfall of the secretary, as they ascended the staircase which led to their bedrooms upon the upper floor.

IV

John Thurston was never a very observant man, and I believe that before I had been three days under his uncle's roof I knew more of what was going on there than he did. My friend was ardently devoted to chemistry, and spent his days happily among his test-tubes and solutions, perfectly contented so long as he had a congenial companion at hand to whom he could communicate his results. For myself, I have always had a weakness for the study and analysis of human character, and I found much that was interesting in the microcosm in which I lived. Indeed, I became so absorbed in my observations that I fear my studies suffered to a considerable extent.

In the first place, I discovered beyond all doubt that the real master of Dunkelthwaite was not Uncle Jeremy, but Uncle Jeremy's amanuensis. My medical instinct told me that the absorbing love of poetry, which had been nothing more than a harmless eccentricity in the old man's younger days, had now become a complete monomania, which filled his mind to the exclusion of every other subject. Copperthorne, by humouring his employer upon this one point until he had made himself indispensable to him, had succeeded in gaining complete power over him in everything else. He managed his money matters and the affairs of the house unquestioned and uncontrolled. He had sense enough, however, to exert his authority so lightly that it galled no one's neck, and therefore excited no opposition. My friend, busy with his distillations and analyses, was never allowed to realise that he was really a nonentity in the establishment.

I have already expressed my conviction that though Copperthorne had some tender feeling for the governess, she by no means favoured his addresses. After a few days I came to think, however, that there existed besides this unrequited affection some other link which bound the pair together. I had seen him more than once assume an air towards her which can only be described as one of authority. Two or three times also I had observed them pacing the lawn and conversing earnestly in the early hours of the night. I could not guess what mutual understanding existed between them, and the mystery piqued my curiosity.

It is proverbially easy to fall in love in a country house, but my nature has never been a sentimental one, and my judgment was not warped by any such feeling towards Miss Warrender. On the contrary, I set myself to study her as an entomologist might a specimen, critically, but without bias. With this object I used to arrange my studies in such a way as to be free at the times when she took the children out for exercise, so that we had many walks together, and I gained a deeper insight into her character than I should otherwise have done.

She was fairly well read, and had a superficial acquaintance with several languages, as well as a great natural taste for music. Underneath this veneer of culture, however, there was a great dash of the savage in her nature. In the course of her conversation she would every now and again drop some remark which would almost startle me by its primitive reasoning, and by its disregard for the conventionalities of civilisation. I could hardly wonder at this, however, when I reflected that she had been a woman before she left the wild tribe which her father ruled.

I remember one instance which sruck me as particularly characteristic, in which her wild original habits suddenly asserted themselves. We were walking along the country road, talking of Germany, in which she had spent some months, when she suddenly stopped short and laid her finger upon her lips. "Lend me your stick!" she said, in a whisper. I handed it to her, and at once, to my astonishment, she darted lightly and noiselessly through a gap in the hedge, and bending her body, crept swiftly along under the shelter of a little knoll. I was still looking after her in amazement, when a rabbit rose suddenly in front of her and scuttled away. She hurled the stick after it and struck it, but the creature made good its escape, though trailing one leg behind it.

She came back to me exultant and panting. "I saw it move among the grass," she said. "I hit it."

"Yes, you hit it. You broke its leg," I said, somewhat coldly. "You hurt it," the little boy cried, ruefully.

"Poor little beast!" she exclaimed, with a sudden change in her whole manner. "I am sorry I harmed it." She seemed completely cast down by the incident, and spoke little during the remainder of our walk. For my own part I could not blame her much. It was evidently an outbreak of the old predatory instinct of the savage, though with a somewhat incongruous effect in the case of a fashionably dressed young lady on an English high road.

John Thurston made me peep into her private sitting-room one day when she was out. She had a thousand little Indian knickknacks there which showed that she had come well-laden from her native land. Her Oriental love for bright colours had exhibited itself in an amusing fashion. She had gone down to the market town and bought numerous sheets of pink and blue paper, and these she had pinned in patches over the sombre covering which had lined the walls before. She had some tinsel too, which she had put up in the most conspicuous places. The whole effect was ludicrously tawdry and glaring, and yet there seemed to me to be a touch of pathos in this attempt to reproduce the brilliance of the tropics in the cold English dwelling-house.

During the first few days of my visit the curious relationship which existed between Miss Warrender and the secretary had simply excited my curiosity, but as the weeks passed and I became more interested in the beautiful Anglo-Indian a deeper and more personal feeling took possession of me. I puzzled my brains as to what tie could exist between them. Why was it that while she showed every symptom of being averse to his company during the day she should walk about with him alone after nightfall? Could it be that the distaste which she showed for him before others was a blind to conceal her real feelings? Such a supposition seemed to involve a depth of dissimulation in her nature which appeared to be incompatible with her frank eyes and clear-cut proud features. And yet, what other hypothesis could account for the power which he most certainly exercised over her?

This power showed itself in many ways, but was exerted so quietly and silently that none but a close observer could have known that it existed. I have seen him glance at her with a look so commanding, and, as it seemed to me, so menacing, that next moment I could hardly believe that his white impassive face could be capable of so intense an expression. When he looked at her in this manner she would wince and quiver as though she had been in physical pain. "Decidedly," I thought, "it is fear and not love which produces such effects."

I was so interested in the question that I spoke to my friend John about it. He was in his little laboratory at the time, and was deeply immersed in a series of manipulations and distillations, which ended in the production of an evil-smelling gas,

which set us both coughing and choking. I took advantage of our enforced retreat into the fresh air to question him upon one or two points on which I wanted information.

"How long did you say that Miss Warrender had been with your uncle?" I asked.

John looked at me slyly, and shook his acid-stained finger. "You seem to be wonderfully interested about the daughter of the late lamented Achmet Genghis," he said.

"Who could help it?" I answered, frankly. "I think she is one of the most romantic characters I ever met."

"Take care of the studies, my boy," John said, paternally. "This sort of thing doesn't do before examinations."

"Don't be ridiculous!" I remonstrated. "Any one would think that I was in love with Miss Warrender to hear the way in which you talk. I look on her as an interesting psychological problem, nothing more."

"Quite so—an interesting psychological problem, nothing more."

John seemed to have some of the vapours of the gas still hanging about his system, for his manner was decidedly irritating.

"To revert to my original question," I said. "How long has she been here?"

"About ten weeks."

"And Copperthorne?"

"Over two years."

"Do you imagine that they could have known each other before?"

"Impossible!" said John, with decision. "She came from Germany. I saw the letter from the old merchant, in which he traced her previous life. Copperthorne has always been in Yorkshire except for two years at Cambridge. He had to leave the university under a cloud."

"What sort of a cloud?"

"Don't know," John answered. "They kept it very quiet. I fancy Uncle Jeremy knows. He's very fond of taking rapscallions up and giving them what he calls another start. Some of them will give him a start some of these fine days."

"And so Copperthorne and Miss Warrender were absolute strangers until the last few weeks?"

"Quite so; and now I think we can go back and analyse the sediment."

"Never mind the sediment," I cried, detaining him. "There's more I want to talk to you about. If these two have only known each other for this short time, how has he managed to gain his power over her?"

John stared at me open-eyed.

"His power?" he said.

"Yes, the power which he exercises over her."

"My dear Hugh," my friend said, gravely, "I'm not in the habit of thus quoting Scripture, but there is one text which occurs irresistibly to my mind, and that is, that 'Much learning bath made thee mad.' You've been reading too hard."

"Do you mean to say," I cried, "that you have never observed that there is some secret understanding between your uncle's governess and his amanuensis?"

"Try bromide of potassium," said John. "It's very soothing in twenty- grain doses."

"Try a pair of spectacles," I retorted, "you most certainly need them;" with which parting shot I turned on my heel and went off in high dudgeon. I had not gone twenty yards down the gravel walk of the garden before I saw the very couple of whom we had just been speaking. They were some little way off, she leaning against the sundial, he standing in front of her and speaking earnestly, with occasional jerky gesticulations. With his tall, gaunt figure towering above her, and the spasmodic motions of his long arms, he might have been some great bat fluttering over a victim. I remember that that was the simile which rose in my mind at the time, heightened perhaps by the suggestion of shrinking and of fear which seemed to me to lie in every curve of her beautiful figure.

The little picture was such an illustration of the text upon which I had been preaching, that I had half a mind to go back to the laboratory and bring the incredulous John out to witness it. Before I had time to come to a conclusion, however, Copperthorne caught a glimpse of me, and turning away, he strolled slowly in the opposite direction into the shrubbery, his companion walking by his side and cutting at the flowers as she passed with her sunshade.

I went up to my room after this small episode with the intention of pushing on with my studies, but do what I would my mind wandered away from my books in order to speculate upon this mystery.

I had learned from John that Copperthorne's antecedents were not of the best, and yet he had obviously gained enormous power over his almost imbecile employer. I could understand this fact by observing the infinite pains with which he devoted himself to the old man's hobby, and the consummate tact with which he humoured and encouraged his strange poetic whims. But how could f account for the to me equally obvious power which he wielded over the governess? She had

no whims to be humoured. Mutual love might account for the tie between them, but my instinct as a man of the world and as an observer of human nature told me most conclusively that no such love existed. If not love, it must be fear—a supposition which was favoured by all that I had seen.

What, then, had occurred during these two months to cause this high- spirited, dark-eyed princess to fear the white-faced Englishman with the soft voice and the gentle manner? That was the problem which I set myself to solve with an energy and earnestness which eclipsed my ardour for study, and rendered me superior to the terrors of my approaching examination.

I ventured to approach the subject that same afternoon to Miss Warrender, whom I found alone in the library, the two little children having gone to spend the day in the nursery of a neighbouring squire.

"You must be rather lonely when there are no visitors," I remarked. "It does not seem to be a very lively part of the country."

"Children are always good companions," she answered. "Nevertheless I shall miss both Mr. Thornton and yourself very much when you go."

"I shall be sorry when the time comes," I said. "I never expected to enjoy this visit as I have done; still you won't be quite cornpanionless when we are gone, you'll always have Mr. Copperthorne."

"Yes; we shall always have Mr. Copperthorne." She spoke with a weary intonation.

"He's a pleasant companion," I remarked; "quiet, well informed, and amiable. I don't wonder that old Mr. Thurston is so fond of him."

As I spoke in this way I watched my companion intently. There was a slight flush on her dark cheeks, and she drummed her fingers impatiently against the arms of the chair.

"His manner may be a little cold sometimes—" I was continuing, but she interrupted me, turning on me furiously, with an angry glare in her black eyes.

"What do you want to talk to me about him for?" she asked.

"I beg pardon," I answered, submissively, "I did not know it was a forbidden subject."

"I don't wish ever to hear his name," she cried, passionately. "I hate it and I hate him. Oh, if I had only some one who loved me—that is, as men love away over the seas in my own land, I know what I should say to him."

"What would you say?" I asked, astonished at this extraordinary outburst.

She leaned forward until I seemed to feel the quick pants of her warm breath upon my face.

"Kill Copperthorne," she said. "That is what I should say to him. Kill Copperthorne. Then you can come and talk of love to me."

Nothing can describe the intensity of fierceness with which she hissed these words out from between her white teeth.

She looked so venomous as she spoke that I involuntarily shrank away from her. Could this pythoness be the demure young lady who sat every day so primly and quietly at the table of Uncle Jeremy? I had hoped to gain some insight into her character by my leading question, but I had never expected to conjure up such a spirit as this. She must have seen the horror and surprise which was depicted on my face, for her manner changed and she laughed nervously.

"You must really think me mad," she said. "You see it is the Indian training breaking out again. We do nothing by halves over there—either loving or hating."

"And why is it that you hate Mr. Copperthorne?" I asked.

"Ah, well," she answered, in a subdued voice, "perhaps hate is rather too strong a term after all. Dislike would be better. There are some people you cannot help having an antipathy to, even though you are unable to give any exact reason."

It was evident that she regretted her recent outburst and was endeavouring to explain it away.

As I saw that she wished to change the conversation, I aided her to do so, and made some remark about a book of Indian prints which she had taken down before I came in, and which still lay upon her lap. Uncle Jeremy's collection was an extensive one, and was particularly rich in works of this class.

"They are not very accurate," she said, turning over the many-coloured leaves. "This is good, though," she continued, picking out a picture of a chieftain clad in chain mail with a picturesque turban upon his head. "This is very good indeed. My father was dressed like that when he rode down on his white charger and led all the warriors of the Dooab to do battle with the Feringhees. My father was chosen out from amongst them all, for they knew that Achmet Genghis Khan was a great priest as well as a great soldier. The people would be led by none but a tried Borka. He is dead now, and of all those who followed his banner there are none who are not scattered or slain, whilst I, his daughter, am a servant in a far land."

"No doubt you will go back to India some day," I said, in a somewhat feeble attempt at consolation.

She turned the pages over listlessly for a few moments without answering. Then she gave a sudden little cry of pleasure as she paused at one of the prints.

"Look at this," she cried, eagerly. "It is one of our wanderers. He is a Bhuttotee. It is very like."

The picture which excited her so was one which represented a particularly uninviting-looking native with a small instrument which looked like a miniature pickaxe in one hand, and a striped handkerchief or roll of linen in the other.

"That handkerchief is his roomal," she said. "Of course he wouldn't go about with it openly like that, nor would he bear the sacred axe, but in every other respect he is as he should be. Many a time have I been with such upon the moonless nights when the Lughaees were on ahead and the heedless stranger heard the Pilhaoo away to the left and knew not what it might mean. Ah! that was a life that was worth the living!"

"And what may a roomal be—and the Lughaee and all the rest of it?" I asked.

"Oh, they are Indian terms," she answered, with a laugh. "You would not understand them."

"But," I said, "this picture is marked as Dacoit, and I always thought that a Dacoit was a robber."

"That is because the English know no better," she observed. "Of course, Dacoits are robbers, but they call many people robbers who are not really so Now this man is a holy man and in all probability a Gooroo."

She might have given me more information upon Indian manners and customs, for it was a subject upon which she loved to talk; but suddenly as I watched her I saw a change come over her face, and she gazed with a rigid stare at the window behind me. I looked round, and there peering stealthily round the corner at us was the face of the amanuensis. I confess that I was startled myself at the sight, for, with its corpse-like pallor, the head might have been one which had been severed from his shoulders. He threw open the sash when he saw that he was observed.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you," he said, looking in, "but don't you think, Miss Warrender, that it is a pity to be boxed up on such a fine day in a close room? Won't you come out and take a stroll?"

Though his words were courteous they were uttered in a harsh and almost menacing voice, so as to sound more like a command than a request. The governess rose, and without protest or remark glided away to put on her bonnet. It was another example of Copperthorne's authority over her. As he looked in at me through the open window a mocking smile played about his thin lips, as though he would have liked to have taunted me with this display of his power. With the sun shining in behind him he might have been a demon in a halo. He stood in this manner for a few moments gazing in at me with concentrated malice upon his face. Then I heard his heavy footfall scrunching along the gravel path as he walked round in the direction of the door.

V

For some days after the interview in which Miss Warrender confessed her hatred of the secretary, things ran smoothly at Dunkelthwaite. I had several long conversations with her as we rambled about the woods and fields with the two little children, but I was never able to bring her round to the subject of her outburst in the library, nor did she tell me anything which threw any light at all upon the problem which interested me so deeply. Whenever I made any remark which might lead in that direction she either answered me in a guarded manner or else discovered suddenly that it was high time that the children were back in their nursery, so that I came to despair of ever learning anything from her lips.

During this time I studied spasmodically and irregularly. Occasionally old Uncle Jeremy would shuffle into my room with a roll of manuscript in his hand, and would read me extracts from his great epic poem. Whenever I felt in need of company I used to go a-visiting to John's laboratory, and he in his turn would come to my chamber if he were lonely. Sometimes I used to vary the monotony of my studies by taking my books out into an arbour in the shrubbery and working there during the day. As to Copperthorne, I avoided him as much as possible, and he, for his part, appeared to be by no means anxious to cultivate my acquaintance.

One day about the second week in June, John came to me with a telegram in his hand and look of considerable disgust upon his face. "Here's a pretty go!" he cried. "The governor wants me to go up at once and meet him in London. It's some legal business, I suppose. He was always threatening to set his affairs in order, and now he has got an energetic fit and intends to do it."

"I suppose you won't be gone long?" I said.

"A week or two perhaps. It's rather a nuisance, just when I was in a fair way towards separating that alkaloid."

"You'll find it there when you come back," I said laughing. "There's no one here who is likely to separate it in your absence."

"What bothers me most is leaving you here," he continued. "It seems such an inhospitable thing to ask a fellow down to a lonely place like this and then to run away and leave him."

"Don't you mind about me," I answered, "I have too much to do to be lonely. Besides, I have found attractions in this place which I never expected. I don't think any six weeks of my life have ever passed more quickly than the last."

"Oh, they passed quickly, did they?" said John, and sniggered to himself. I am convinced that he was still under the delusion that I was hopelessly in love with the governess.

He went off that day by the early train, promising to write and tell us his address in town, for he did not know yet at which hotel his father would put up. I little knew what a difference this trifle would make, nor what was to occur before I

set eyes upon my friend once more. At the time I was by no means grieved at his departure. It brought the four of us who were left into closer apposition, and seemed to favour the solving of that problem in which I found myself from day to day becoming more interested.

About a quarter of a mile from the house of Dunkelthwaite there is a straggling little village of the same name, consisting of some twenty or thirty slate-roofed cottages, with an ivy-clad church hard by and the inevitable beerhouse. On the afternoon of the very day on which John left us, Miss Warrender and the two children walked down to the post-office there, and I volunteered to accompany them.

Copperthorne would have liked well to have either prevented the excursion or to have gone with us, but fortunately Uncle Jeremy was in the throes of composition, and the services of his secretary were indispensable to him. It was a pleasant walk, I remember, for the road was well shaded by trees, and the birds were singing merrily overhead. We strolled along together, talking of many things, while the little boy and girl ran on, laughing and romping.

Before you get to the post-office you have to pass the beerhouse already mentioned. As we walked down the village street we became conscious that a small knot of people had assembled in front of this building. There were a dozen or so ragged boys and draggle-tailed girls, with a few bonnetless women, and a couple of loungers from the bar—probably as large an assemblage as ever met together in the annals of that quiet neighbourhood. We could not see what it was that was exciting their curiosity, but the children scampered on and quickly returned brimful of information.

"Oh, Miss Warrender," Johnnie cried, as he dashed up, panting and eager, "there's a black man there like the ones you tell us stories about!"

"A gipsy, I suppose," I said.

"No, no," said Johnnie, with decision; "he is blacker than that, isn't he, May?"

"Blacker than that," the little girl echoed.

"I suppose we had better go and see what this wonderful apparition is," I said.

As I spoke I glanced at my companion. To my surprise, she was very pale, and her great black eyes appeared to be luminous with suppressed excitement.

"Aren't you well?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. Come on!" she cried, eagerly, quickening her step; "come on!"

It was certainly a curious sight which met our eyes when we joined the little circle of rustics. It reminded me of the description of the opium-eating Malay whom De Quincey saw in the farmhouse in Scotland. In the centre of the circle of homely Yorkshire folk there stood an Oriental wanderer, tall, lithe, and graceful, his linen clothes stained with dust and his brown feet projecting through his rude shoes. It was evident that he had travelled far and long. He had a heavy stick in his hand, on which he leaned, while his dark eyes looked thoughtfully away into space, careless apparently of the throng around him. His picturesque attire, with his coloured turban and swarthy face, had a strange and incongruous effect amongst all the prosaic surroundings.

"Poor fellow!" Miss Warrender said to me, speaking in an excited, gasping voice. "He is tired and hungry, no doubt, and cannot explain his wants. I will speak to him;" and, going up to the Indian, she said a few words in his native dialect.

Never shall I forget the effect which those few syllables produced. Without a word the wanderer fell straight down upon his face on the dusty road and absolutely grovelled at the feet of my companion. I had read of Eastern forms of abasement when in the presence of a superior, but I could not have imagined that any human could have expressed such abject humility as was indicated in this man's attitude.

Miss Warrender spoke again in a sharp and commanding voice, on which he sprang to his feet and stood with his hands clasped and his eyes cast down, like a slave in the presence of his mistress. The little crowd, who seemed to think that the sudden prostration had been the prelude to some conjuring feat or acrobatic entertainment, looked on amused and interested.

"Should you mind walking on with the children and posting the letters?" the governess said. "I should like to have a word with this man."

I complied with her request, and when I returned in a few minutes the two were still conversing. The Indian appeared to be giving a narrative of his adventures or detailing the causes of his journey, for he spoke rapidly and excitedly, with quivering fingers and gleaming eyes. Miss Warrender listened intently, giving an occasional start or exclamation, which showed how deeply the man's statement interested her.

"I must apologise for detaining you so long in the sun," she said, turning to me at last. "We must go home, or we shall be late for dinner."

With a few parting sentences, which sounded like commands, she left her dusky acquaintance still standing in the village street, and we strolled homewards with the children.

"Well?" I asked, with natural curiosity, when we were out of earshot of the visitors. "Who is he, and what is he?"

"He comes from the Central Provinces, near the land of the Mahrattas. He is one of us. It has been quite a shock to me to

meet a fellow-countryman so unexpectedly; I feel quite upset."

"It must have been pleasant for you," I remarked. "Yes, very pleasant," she said, heartily.

"And why did he fall down like that?"

"Because he knew me to be the daughter of Achmet Genghis Khan," she said, proudly.

"And what chance has brought him here?"

"Oh, it's a long story," she said, carelessly. "He has led a wandering life. How dark it is in this avenue, and how the great branches shoot across! If you were to crouch on one of those you could drop down on the back of any one who passed, and they would never know that you were there until they felt your fingers on their throat."

"What a horrible idea!" I exclaimed.

"Gloomy places always give me gloomy thoughts," she said, lightly. "By the way, I want you to do me a favour, Mr. Lawrence."

"What is that?" I asked.

"Don't say anything at the house about this poor compatriot of mine. They might think him a rogue and a vagabond, you know, and order him to be driven from the village."

"I'm sure Mr. Thurston would do nothing so unkind."

"No; but Mr. Copperthorne might."

"Just as you like," I said; "but the children are sure to tell."

"No, I think not," she answered.

I don't know how she managed to curb their little prattling tongues, but they certainly preserved silence upon the point, and there was no talk that evening of the strange visitor who had wandered into our little hamlet.

I had a shrewd suspicion that this stranger from the tropics was no chance wanderer, but had come to Dunkelthwaite upon some set errand. Next day I had the best possible evidence that he was still in the vicinity, for I met Miss Warrender coming down the garden walk with a basketful of scraps of bread and of meat in her hand. She was in the habit of taking these leavings to sundry old women in the neighbourhood, so I offered to accompany her.

"Is it old Dame Venables or old Dame Taylforth to-day?" I asked.

"Neither one nor the other," she said, with a smile. "I'll tell you the truth, Mr. Lawrence, because you have always been a good friend to me, and I feel I can trust you. These scraps are for my poor countryman. I'll hang the basket here on this branch, and he will get it."

"Oh, he's still about, then," I observed.

"Yes, he's still in the neighbourhood."

"You think he will find it?"

"Oh, trust him for that," she said. "You don't blame me for helping him, do you? You would do the same if you lived among Indians and suddenly came upon an Englishman. Come to the hothouse and look at the flowers."

We walked round to the conservatory together. When we came back the basket was still hanging to the branch, but the contents were gone. She took it down with a laugh and carried it in with her.

It seemed to me that since this interview with her countryman the day before her spirits had become higher and her step freer and more elastic. It may have been imagination, but it appeared to me also that she was not as constrained as usual in the presence of Copperthorne, and that she met his glances more fearlessly, and was less under the influence of his will.

And now I am coming to that part of this statement of mine which describes how I first gained an insight into the relation which existed between those two strange mortals, and learned the terrible truth about Miss Warrender, or of the Princess Achmet Genghis, as I should prefer to call her, for assuredly she was the descendant of the fierce fanatical warrior rather than of her gentle mother.

To me the revelation came as a shock, the effect of which I can never forget. It is possible that in the way in which I have told the story, emphasising those facts which had a bearing upon her, and omitting those which had not, my readers have already detected the strain which ran in her blood. As for myself, I solemnly aver that up to the last moment I had not the smallest suspicion of the truth. Little did I know what manner of woman this was, whose hand I pressed in friendship, and whose voice was music to my ears. Yet it is my belief, looking back, that she was really well disposed to me, and would not willingly have harmed me.

It was in this manner that the revelation came about. I think I have mentioned that there was a certain arbour in the shrubbery in which I was accustomed to study during the daytime. One night, about ten o'clock, I found on going to my room that I had left a book on gynwcology in this summer-house, and as I intended to do a couple of hours' work before turning in, I started off with the intention of getting it. Uncle Jeremy and the servants had already gone to bed, so I slipped downstairs very quietly and turned the key gently in the front door. Once in the open air, I hurried rapidly across the lawn,

and so into the shrubbery, with the intention of regaining my property and returning as rapidly as possible.

I had hardly passed the little wooden gate and entered the plantation before I heard the sound of talking, and knew that I had chanced to stumble upon one of those nocturnal conclaves which I had observed from my window. The voices were those of the secretary and of the governess, and it was clear to me, from the direction in which they sounded, that they were sitting in the arbour and conversing together without any suspicion of the presence of a third person. I have ever held that eavesdropping, under any circumstances, is a dishonourable practice, and curious as I was to know what passed between these two, I was about to cough or give some other signal of my presence, when suddenly I heard some words of Copperthorne's which brought me to a halt with every faculty overwhelmed with horrified amazement.

"They'll think he died of apoplexy," were the words which sounded clearly and distinctly through the peaceful air in the incisive tones of the amanuensis.

I stood breathless, listening with all my ears. Every thought of announcing my presence had left me. What was the crime which these ill-assorted conspirators were hatching upon this lovely summer's night.

I heard the deep sweet tones of her voice, but she spoke so rapidly, and in such a subdued manner, that I could not catch the words. I could tell by the intonation that she was under the influence of deep emotion. I drew nearer on tip-toe, with my ears straining to catch every sound. The moon was not up yet, and under the shadows of the trees it was very dark. There was little chance of my being observed.

"Eaten his bread, indeed!" the secretary said, derisively. "You are not usually so squeamish. You did not think of that in the case of little Ethel."

"I was mad! I was mad!" she ejaculated in a broken voice. "I had prayed much to Buddha and to the great Bhowanee, and it seemed to me that in this land of unbelievers it would be a great and glorious thing for me, a lonely woman, to act up to the teachings of my great father. There are few women who are admitted into the secrets of our faith, and it was but by an accident that the honour came upon me. Yet, having once had the path pointed out to me, I have walked straight and fearlessly, and the great Gooroo Ramdeen Singh has said that even in my fourteenth year I was worthy to sit upon the cloth of the Tupounee with the other Bhuttotees. Yet I swear by the sacred pickaxe that I have grieved much over this, for what had the poor child done that she should be sacrificed!"

"I fancy that my having caught you has had more to do with your repentance than the moral aspect of the case," Copperthorne said, with a sneer. "I may have had my misgivings before, but it was only when I saw you rising up with the handkerchief in your hand that I knew for certain that we were honoured by the presence of a Princess of the Thugs. An English scaffold would be rather a prosaic end for such a romantic being."

"And you have used your knowledge ever since to crush all the life out of me," she said, bitterly. "You have made my existence a burden to me."

"A burden to you!" he said, in an altered voice. "You know what my feelings are towards you. If I have occasionally governed you by the fear of exposure it was only because I found you were insensible to the milder influence of love."

"Love!" she cried, bitterly. "How could I love a man who held a shameful death for ever before my eyes. But let us come to the point. You promise me my unconditional liberty if I do this one thing for you?"

"Yes," Copperthorne answered; "you may go where you will when this is done. I shall forget what I saw here in the shrubbery."

"You swear it?"

"Yes, I swear it."

"I would do anything for my freedom," she said.

"We can never have such a chance again," Copperthorne cried. "Young Thurston is gone, and this friend of his sleeps heavily, and is too stupid to suspect. The will is made out in my favour, and if the old man dies every stock and stone of the great estate will be mine."

"Why don't you do it yourself, then?" she asked.

"It's not in my line," he said. "Besides, I have not got the knack. That roomal, or whatever you call it, leaves no mark. That's the advantage of it."

"It is an accursed thing to slay one's benefactor."

"But it is a great thing to serve Bhowanee, the goddess of murder. I know enough of your religion to know that. Would not your father do it if he were here?"

"My father was the greatest of all the Borkas of Jublepore," she said, proudly. "He has slain more than there are days in the year."

"I wouldn't have met him for a thousand pounds," Copperthorne remarked, with a laugh. "But what would Achmet Genghis Khan say now if he saw his daughter hesitate with such a chance before her of serving the gods? You have done excellently so far. He may well have smiled when the infant soul of young Ethel was wafted up to this god or ghoul of yours. Perhaps this is not the first sacrifice you have made. How about the daughter of this charitable German merchant? Ah, I

see in your face that I am right again! After such deeds you do wrong to hesitate now when there is no danger and all shall be made easy to you. Besides that, the deed will free you from your existence here, which cannot be particularly pleasant with a rope, so to speak, round your neck the whole time. If it is to be done it must be done at once. He might rewrite his will at any moment, for he is fond of the lad, and is as changeable as a weather-cock."

There was a long pause, and a silence so profound that I seemed to hear my own heart throbbing in the darkness.

"When shall it be done?" she asked at last.

"Why not to-morrow night?"

"How am I to get to him?"

"I shall leave his door open," Copperthorne said. "He sleeps heavily, and I shall leave a night-light burning, so that you may see your way."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards you will return to your room. In the morning it will be discovered that our poor employer has passed away in his sleep. It will also be found that he has left all his worldly goods as a slight return for the devoted labours of his faithful secretary. Then the services of Miss Warrender the governess being no longer required, she may go back to her beloved country or to anywhere else that she fancies. She can run away with Mr. John Lawrence, student of medicine, if she pleases."

"You insult me," she said, angrily; and then, after a pause. "You must meet me to-morrow night before I do this."

"Why so?" he asked.

"Because there may be some last instructions which I may require."

"Let it be here, then, at twelve," he said.

"No, not here. It is too near the house. Let us meet under the great oak at the head of the avenue."

"Where you will," he answered, sulkily; "but mind, I'm not going to be with you when you do it."

"I shall not ask you," she said, scornfully. "I think we have said all that need be said to-night."

I heard the sound of one or other of them rising to their feet, and though they continued to talk I did not stop to hear more, but crept quietly out from my place of concealment and scudded across the dark lawn and in through the door, which I closed behind me. It was only when I had regained my room and had sunk back into my armchair that I was able to collect my scattered senses and to think over the terrible conversation to which I had listened. Long into the hours of the night I sat motionless, meditating over every word that I had heard and endeavouring to form in my mind some plan of action for the future.

VI

The Thugs! I had heard of the wild fanatics of that name who are found in the central part of India, and whose distorted religion represents murder as being the highest and purest of all the gifts which a mortal can offer to the Creator. I remember an account of them which I had read in the works of Colonel Meadows Taylor, of their secrecy, their organisation, their relentlessness, and the terrible power which their homicidal craze has over every other mental or moral faculty. I even recalled now that the roomal—a word which I had heard her mention more than once—was the sacred handkerchief with which they were wont to work their diabolical purpose. She was already a woman when she had left them, and being, according to her own account, the, daughter of their principal leader, it was no wonder that the varnish of civilisation had not eradicated all her early impressions or prevented the breaking out of occasional fits of fanaticism. In one of these apparently she had put an end to poor Ethel, having carefully prepared an alibi to conceal her crime, and it was Copperthorne's accidental discovery of this murder which gave him his power over his strange associate. Of all deaths that by hanging is considered among these tribes to be the most impious and degrading, and her knowledge that she had subjected herself to this death by the law of the land was evidently the reason why she had found herself compelled to subject her will and tame her imperious nature when in the presence of the amanuensis.

As to Copperthorne himself, as I thought over what he had done, and what he proposed to do, a great horror and loathing filled my whole soul. Was this his return for the kindness lavished upon him by the poor old man? He had already cozened him into signing away his estates, and now, for fear some prickings of conscience should cause him to change his mind, he had determined to put it out of his power ever to write a codicil. All this was bad enough, but the acme of all seemed to be that, too cowardly to effect his purpose with his own hand, he had made use of this unfortunate woman's horrible conceptions of religion in order to remove Uncle Jeremy in such a way that no suspicion could possibly fall upon the real culprit. I determined in my mind that, come what might, the amanuensis should not escape from the punishment due to his crimes.

But what was I to do? Had I known my friend's address I should have telegraphed for him in the morning, and he could have been back in Dunkelthwaite before nightfall. Unfortunately John was the worst of correspondents, and though he had been gone for some days we had had no word yet of his whereabouts. There were three maid-servants in the house, but no man, with the exception of old Elijah; nor did I know of any upon whom I could rely in the neighbourhood. This, however,

was a small matter, for I knew that in personal strength I was more than a match for the secretary, and I had confidence enough in myself to feel that my resistance alone would prevent any possibility of the plot being carried out.

The question was, what were the best steps for me to take under the circumstances? My first impulse was to wait until morning, and then to quietly go or send to the nearest police-station and summon a couple of constables. I could then hand Copperthorne and his female accomplice over to justice and narrate the conversation which I had overheard. On second thoughts this plan struck me as being a very impracticable one. What grain of evidence had I against them except my story? which, to people who did not know me, would certainly appear a very wild and improbable one. I could well imagine too the plausible voice and imperturbable manner with which Copperthorne would oppose the accusation, and how he would dilate upon the which I bore both him and his companion on account of their mutual affection. How easy it would be for him to make a third person believe that I was trumping up a story in the hope of injuring a rival, and how difficult for me to make any one credit that this clerical-looking gentleman and this stylishly-dressed young lady were two beasts of prey who were hunting in couples! I felt that it would be a great mistake for me to show my hand before I was sure of the game.

The alternative was to say nothing and to let things take their course, being always ready to step in when the evidence against the conspirators appeared to be conclusive. This was the course which recommended itself to my young adventurous disposition, and it also appeared to be the one most likely to lead to conclusive results. When at last at early dawn I stretched myself upon my bed and I had fully made up my mind to retain my knowledge in my own breast, and to trust to myself entirely for the defeat of the murderous plot which I had overheard.

Old Uncle Jeremy was in high spirits next morning after breakfast, and insisted upon reading aloud a scene from Shelley's "Cenci," a work for which he had a profound admiration. Copperthorne sat silent and inscrutable by his side, save when he threw in a suggestion or uttered an exclamation of admiration. Miss Warrender appeared to be lost in thought, and it seemed to me more than once that I saw tears in her dark eyes. It was strange for me to watch the three of them and to think of the real relation in which they stood to each other. My heart warmed towards my little red-faced host with the quaint head- gear and the old-fashioned ways. I vowed to myself that no harm should befall him while I had power to prevent it.

The day wore along slowly and drearily. It was impossible for me to settle down to work, so I wandered restlessly about the corridors of the old- fashioned house and over the garden. Copperthorne was with Uncle Jeremy upstairs, and I saw little of him. Twice when I was striding up and down outside I perceived the governess coming with the children in my direction, but on each occasion I avoided her by hurrying away. I felt that I could not speak to her without showing the intense horror with which she inspired me, and so betraying my knowledge of what had transpired the night before. She noticed that I shunned her, for at luncheon, when my eyes caught hers for a moment, she flashed across a surprised and injured glance, to which, however, I made no response.

The afternoon post brought a letter from John telling us that he was stopping at the Langham. I knew that it was now impossible for him to be of any use to me in the way of sharing the responsibility of whatever might occur, but I nevertheless thought it my duty to telegraph to him and let him know that his presence was desirable. This involved a long walk to the station, but that was useful as helping me to while away the time, and I felt a weight off my mind when I heard the clicking of the needles which told me that my message was flying upon its way.

When I reached the avenue gate on my return from Ingleton I found our old serving-man Elijah standing there, apparently in a violent passion.

"They says as one rat brings others," he said to me, touching his hat, "and it seems as it be the same with they darkies."

He had always disliked the governess on account of what he called her "uppish ways."

"What's the matter, then?" I asked.

"It's one o' they furriners a-hidin' and a-prowlin'," said the old man. "I seed him here among the bushes, and I sent him off wi' a bit o' my mind. Lookin' after the hens as like as not, or maybe wantin' to burn the house and murder us all in our beds. I'll go down to the village, Muster Lawrence, and see what he's after," and he hurried away in a paroxysm of senile anger.

This little incident made a considerable impression on me, and I thought seriously over it as I walked up the long avenue. It was clear that the wandering Hindoo was still hanging about the premises. He was a factor whom I had forgotten to take into account. If his compatriot enlisted him as an accomplice in her dark plans, it was possible that the three of them might be too many for me. Still it appeared to me to be improbable that she should do so, since she had taken such pains to conceal his presence from Copperthorne.

I was half tempted to take Elijah into my confidence, but on second thoughts I came to the conclusion that a man of his age would be worse than useless as an ally.

About seven o'clock I was going up to my room when I met the secretary, who asked me whether I could tell him where Miss Warrender was. I answered that I had not seen her.

"It's a singular thing," he said, "that no one has seen her since dinner- time. The children don't know where she is. I particularly want to speak to her."

He hurried on with an agitated and disturbed expression upon his features.

As to me, Miss Warrender's absence did not seem a matter of surprise. No doubt she was out in the shrubbery somewhere, nerving herself for the terrible piece of work which she had undertaken to do. I closed my door behind me and sat down, with a book in my hand, but with my mind too much excited to comprehend the contents. My plan of campaign had been already formed. I determined to be within sight of their trysting-place, to follow them, and to interfere at the moment when my interference would have most effect. I had chosen a thick, knobby stick, dear to my student heart, and with this I knew that I was master of the situation, for I had ascertained that Copperthorne had no firearms.

I do not remember any period of my life when the hours passed so slowly as did those which I spent in my room that night. Far away I heard the mellow tones of the Dunklethwaite clock as it struck the hours of eight and then of nine, and then, after an interminable pause, of ten. After that it seemed as though time had stopped altogether as I paced my little room, fearing and yet longing for the hour as men will when some great ordeal has to be faced. All things have an end, however, and at last there came pealing through the still night air the first clear stroke which announced the eleventh hour. Then I rose, and, putting on my soft slippers, I seized my stick and slipped quietly out of my room and down the creaking old-fashioned staircase. I could hear the stertorous snoring of Uncle Jeremy upon the floor above. I managed to feel my way to the door through the darkness, and having opened it passed out into the beautiful starlit night.

I had to be very careful of my movements, because the moon shone so brightly that it was almost as light as day. I hugged the shadow of the house until I reached the garden hedge, and then, crawling down in its shelter, I found myself safe in the shrubbery in which I had been the night before. Through this I made my way, treading very cautiously and gingerly, so that not a stick snapped beneath my feet. In this way I advanced until I found myself among the brushwood at the edge of the plantation and within full view of the great oak-tree which stood at the upper end of the avenue.

There was someone standing under the shadow of the oak. At first I could hardly make out who it was, but presently the figure began to move, and, coming out into a silvery patch where the moon shone down between two branches, looked impatiently to left and to right. Then I saw that it was Copperthorne, who was waiting alone. The governess apparently had not yet kept her appointment.

As I wished to hear as well as to see, I wormed my way along under the dark shadows of the trunks in the direction of the oak. When I stopped I was not more than fifteen paces from the spot where the tall gaunt figure of the amanuensis looked grim and ghastly in the shifting light. He paced about uneasily, now disappearing in the shadow, now reappearing in the silvery patches where the moon broke through the covering above him. It was evident from his movements that he was puzzled and disconcerted at the non-appearance of his accomplice. Finally he stationed himself under a great branch which concealed his figure, while from beneath it he commanded a view of the gravel drive which led down from the house, and along which, no doubt, he expected Miss Warrender to come.

I was still lying in my hiding-place, congratulating myself inwardly at having gained a point from which I could hear all without risk of discovery, when my eye lit suddenly upon something which made my heart rise to my mouth and almost caused me to utter an ejaculation which would have betrayed my presence.

I have said that Copperthorne was standing immediately under one of the great branches of the oak-tree. Beneath this all was plunged in the deepest shadow, but the upper part of the branch itself was silvered over by the light of the moon. As I gazed I became conscious that down this luminous branch something was crawling—a flickering, inchoate something, almost indistinguishable from the branch itself, and yet slowly and steadily writhing its way down it. My eyes, as I looked, became more accustomed to the light, and then this indefinite something took form and substance. It was a human being—a man—the Indian whom I had seen in the village. With his arms and legs twined round the great limb, he was shuffling his way down as silently and almost as rapidly as one of his native snakes.

Before I had time to conjecture the meaning of his presence he was directly over the spot where the secretary stood, his bronzed body showing out hard and clear against the disc of moon behind him. I saw him take something from round his waist, hesitate for a moment, as though judging his distance, and then spring downwards, crashing through the intervening foliage. There was a heavy thud, as of two bodies falling together, and then there rose on the night air a noise as of some one gargling his throat, followed by a succession of croaking sounds, the remembrance of which will haunt me to my dying day.

Whilst this tragedy had been enacted before my eyes its entire unexpectedness and its horror had bereft me of the power of acting in any way. Only those who have been in a similar position can imagine the utter paralysis of mind and body which comes upon a man in such straits, and prevents him from doing the thousand and one things which may be suggested afterwards as having been appropriate to the occasion. When those notes of death, however, reached my ears I shook off my lethargy and ran forward with a loud cry from my place of concealment. At the sound the young Thug sprang from his victim with a snarl like a wild beast driven from a carcase, and made off down the avenue at such a pace that I felt it to be impossible for me to overtake him. I ran to the secretary and raised his head. His face was purple and horribly distorted. I loosened his shirt-collar and did all I could to restore him, but it was useless. The roomal had done its work, and he was dead.

I have little more to add to this strange tale of mine. If I have been somewhat long-winded in the telling of it, I feel that I owe no apology for that, for I have simply set the successive events down in a plain unvarnished fashion, and the narrative would be incomplete without any one of them. It transpired afterwards that Miss Warrender had caught the 7.20 London train, and was safe in the metropolis before any search could be made for her. As to the messenger of death whom she had left behind to keep her appointment with Copperthorne under the old oak-tree, he was never either heard of or seen again.

There was a hue and cry over the whole countryside, but nothing came of it. No doubt the fugitive passed the days in sheltered places, and travelled rapidly at night, living on such scraps as can sustain an Oriental, until he was out of danger.

John Thornton returned next day, and I poured all the facts into his astonished ears. He agreed with me that it was best perhaps not to speak of what I knew concerning Copperthcirne's plans and the reasons which kept him out so late upon that summer's night. Thus even the county police have never known the full story of that strange tragedy, and they certainly never shall, unless, indeed, the eyes of some of them should chance to fall upon this narrative. Poor Uncle Jeremy mourned the loss of his secretary for months, and many were the verses which he poured forth in the form of epitaphs and of "In Memoriam" poems. He has been gathered to his fathers himself since then, and the greater part of his estate has, I am glad to say, descended to the rightful heir, his nephew.

There is only one point on which I should like to make a remark. How was it that the wandering Thug came to Dunkelthwaite? This question has never been cleared up; but I have not the slightest doubt in my own mind, nor I think can anyone have who considers the facts of the case, that there was no chance about his appearance. The sect in India were a large and powerful body, and when they came to look around for a fresh leader, they naturally bethought them of the beautiful daughter of their late chief. It would be no difficult matter to trace her to Calcutta, to Germany, and finally to Dunkelthwaite. He had come, no doubt, with the message that she was not forgotten in India, and that a warm welcome awaited her if she chose to join her scattered tribesmen. This may seem far-fetched, but it is the opinion which I have always entertained upon the matter.

I began this statement by a quotation from a letter, and I shall end it by one. This was from an old friend, Dr. B.C. Haller, a man of encyclopmdic knowledge, and particularly well versed in Indian manners and customs. It is through his kindness that I am able to reproduce the various native words which I heard from time to time from the lips of Miss Warrender, but which I should not have been able to recall to my memory had he not suggested them to me. This is a letter in which he comments upon the matter, which I had mentioned to him in conversation some time previously:

> *"My dear Lawrence,—I promised to write to you re Thuggee, but my time has been so occupied that it is only now that I can redeem my pledge. I was much interested in your unique experience, and should much like to have further talk with you upon the subject. I may inform you that it is most unusual for a woman to be initiated into the mysteries of Thuggee, and it arose in this case probably from her having accidently or by design tasted the sacred goor, which was the sacrifice offered by the gang after each murder. Any one doing this must become an acting Thug, whatever the rank, sex, or condition. Being of noble blood she would then rapidly pass through the different grades of Tilhaee, or scout, Lughaee, or grave-digger, Shumsheea, or holder of the victim's hands, and finally of Bhuttotee, or strangler. In all this she would be instructed by her Gooroo, or spiritual adviser, whom she mentions in your account as having been her own father, who was a Borka, or an expert Thug. Having once attained this position, I do not wonder that her fanatical instincts broke out at times. The Pilhaoo which she mentions in one place was the omen on the left hand, which, if it is followed by the Thibaoo, or omen on the right, was considered to be an indication that all would go well. By the way, you mention that the old coachman saw the Hindoo lurking about among the bushes in the morning. Do you know what he was doing? I am very much mistaken if he was not digging Copperthorne's grave, for it is quite opposed to Thug customs to kill a man without having some receptacle prepared for his body. As far as I know only one English officer in India has ever fallen a victim to the fraternity, and that was Lieutenant Monsell, in 1812. Since then Colonel Sleeman has stamped it out to a great extent, though it is unquestionable that it flourishes far more than the authorities suppose. Truly 'the dark places of the earth are full of cruelty,' and nothing but the Gospel will ever effectually dispel that darkness. You are very welcome to publish these few remarks if they seem to you to throw any light upon your narrative.*
>
> *"Yours very sincerely,*
>
> *"B.C. HALLER."*